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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving the reading skills of third grade students using sixth grade tutors. The target population consisted of third and sixth grade students located in northeastern Illinois. The problems of low reading skills upon entering third grade were documented through the use of several reading tests and lists. Analysis of probable cause data revealed that many students were entering the third grade with below average reading skills. During the month of September the students were tested to find the right candidates for tutoring. The Wide Range Achievement Test, the Woodcock-Johnson Psychological Battery, and the Dolch sight word list were used to select the five students to be tutored. The 6th grade teacher was allowed to decide which students she felt would be responsible enough to be involved in the program. Reviews of curricula content and instructional strategies also revealed gaps in teaching student learning styles. A review of solution strategies gathered through research, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of a formatted tutoring program entitled "Great Leaps." This provided the sixth grade students a set of materials from which to work, which allowed structure and a reduction of stress levels among the tutors. Post intervention data indicated an increase in the reading levels of three of the five third grade students who were tutored. The other two either stayed at the same level or dropped. Appendixes contain the Dolch sight word list for third grade and the parent survey. Also appended are the following copyrighted pages: Wide Range Achievement Test--Revised Level 1 (Jastak Associates, 1984); Great Leaps Phonics, Great Leaps Sight Phrases, Great Leaps Elementary Reading, and Great Leaps Reading Progress Chart (Kenneth U. Campbell, 1998). (Contains 62 references, 2 figures, and 8 tables.) (Author/RS)

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IMPROVING THE READING SKILLS OF THIRD GRADE STUDENTS WHEN USING A PEER-TUTORING PROGRAM INVOLVING SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

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This report describes a program for improving the reading skills of third grade students using sixth grade tutors. The target population consisted of third and sixth grade students located in northeastern Illinois. The problems of low reading skills upon entering third grade were documented through the use of several reading tests and lists.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed that many students were entering the third grade with below average reading skills. During the month of September the students were tested to find the right candidates for tutoring. The Wide Range Achievement Test, the Woodcock-Johnson Psychological Battery, and the Dolch sight word list were used to select the five students to be tutored. The 6th grade teacher was allowed to decide which students she felt would be responsible enough to be involved in the program. Reviews of curricula content and instructional strategies also revealed gaps in reaching student learning styles.

A review of solution strategies gathered through research, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of a formatted tutoring program entitled "Great Leaps." This provided the sixth grade students a set of materials from which to work, which allowed structure and a reduction of stress levels among the tutors.

Post intervention data indicated an increase in the reading levels of three of the five third grade students who were tutored. The other two either stayed at the same level or dropped.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted second grade classroom demonstrate a lack of reading skills resulting in below grade level scores. Evidence for the existence of the problem includes teacher checklists, teacher surveys, report cards, as well as, pre- and post- evaluations of formal and informal assessments that indicate the students' reading performances.

Immediate Problem Context

The description of the setting includes one elementary school district located in a northern midwestern state. All information was taken from the 2000 school report, a document required by each school in the state. A copy of this document is shared with each family that has a child attending the school.

The school targeted for the action research serves kindergarten through sixth grade students. It is classified as a medium sized elementary school with a population of approximately 347 students. It is a culturally diverse school with 31% Caucasian, 47% African-American, 18% Hispanic, and 2% Asian/Pacific Islander. Roughly one-half of this population is low income and 7% are limited English proficient. The school's attendance rate is 94% and the

student mobility rate, the rate at which students move in and out of the district, is 27%. There is no chronic truancy reported.

The targeted elementary school is part of an established elementary district, which contains five schools servicing kindergarten through sixth grade students and one middle school servicing seventh and eighth grade students. Of the 347 students enrolled, 55 are third graders. There are eighteen classrooms. The average class size is 23 students. There is one special education class consisting of 21 students.

The elementary school has one part-time social worker, one part-time enrichment teacher for gifted students who rank in the top 10% of their class, one part-time speech pathologist, and one hearing intenerate specialist to service the building. The two-story brick building is located in a residential area that was built in the year 1946. The site contains one gym that serves as a cafeteria, one library, and one computer lab containing 27 computers. The first level of the building houses kindergarten through second grade. The second level houses third grade through sixth grade. There are a total of 21 full time teachers, 4 part-time specialists, an enrichment teacher, one reading aide, one library aide, one part-time health aide, one ESL aide, and one secretary. A male principal is responsible for managing student discipline and ensuring that teachers are meeting state standards. Teachers teach an average of 60 minutes of math, 60 minutes of science, 40 minutes of social studies, and 160 minutes of English per day. English defined in the targeted school includes reading, writing, grammar, and spelling. Teachers are also responsible for maintaining correct classroom conduct.

Surrounding Community

Established in the suburbs, Site A's community is found midway between two large metropolitan areas. This Midwest community is approximately 35 miles from a major airport

and has easy access to an interstate highway system, a large body of water, and a large theme park. The population of Site A consists of approximately 23,000 people housed in a mixture of starter homes and apartments. The community's housing value averages at approximately $110,000 as compared to the county average of $138,000. The average annual income is $52,011 with a poverty rate of 16.3%. This community holds the county's highest density of Section 8 federally subsidized housing in the county. The district and the surrounding community's primary source of revenue were eliminated in 1998 due to the closure of a nuclear power plant. The plant was responsible for generating $6.9 million of the district's local revenue.

School District

The school district serves approximately 2,800 children in grades kindergarten through eighth grades. There are five K-6th elementary buildings and one junior high school composed of seventh and eighth grade students. It is the sixth largest school district in the county. The certified staff population of Site A's district is 161. This creates a pupil-teacher ratio of 22.1:1. Female teachers comprise 82.1% of the total teacher population while male teachers represent 17.9%. The faculty characteristics for Site A are 41.7% of the teachers have Bachelor's degrees and 58.3% have a Master's degree and above. Teachers have been employed by the district for an average of 14.7 years with an average salary of $52,851. The racial/ethnic characteristics of the certified staff are not reflective of the student or community population. In the district, 88.2% of teachers are Caucasian, 9.3% of the teachers are African-American, 1.2% of the teachers are Hispanic and 1.2% are Asian/Pacific Islander. The teachers at the targeted elementary school are predominantly white as opposed to the high African-American population found in the demographic/ ethnic background of the student enrollment and the community.

Site A's district administration includes one superintendent of schools, one assistant superintendent of business, one assistant superintendent for special services, six principals, and three assistant principals. The average administrator's salary is $76,891. The pupil-administer ratio is 244.9:1.

In the district, the superintendent describes the community as having an inactive parent involvement at Site A. At the targeted elementary school, a small Parent Teacher Organization exists which has developed and oversees a volunteer program, that only consists of five adult volunteers.

National Context of the Problem

Despite reading's undeniably significant role in the public school system (and in society at large), the topic of reading itself often does not receive the national attention it demands. Often times, when reading is mentioned, it is a broad and generic argument, usually in conjunction with one's attempt to discredit the public school system's overall educational impact on students. Most national writers on the issue fall either in this school of thought, or in the school of thought seeking to offer more specific answers to the national reading problem.

While discussing national attitudes towards the public school system, Marlow Ediger (2000) mentions reading directly, when he reiterates the following national assumption about public schools: "individuals cannot read... at an acceptable level when entering the world of work." (p. 399). Finding this criticism vague, he then follows it up by asking an appropriate rhetorical question, "What is this acceptable level of having mastered the three R's?" (p. 399). In general, he seems highly skeptical of those attacking the public school system and its ability to produce good readers: "there is much criticism and bashing of public schools when writers write that workers at the work place cannot read, write, or compute satisfactorily" (p. 401). He finds

this criticism unspecified and unsubstantiated as well. Addressing one major national issue, he goes on: "I do not know what the business world means when it talks about workers graduating from United States High Schools being illiterate" (p. 401). In short, Ediger believes nationwide criticisms of schools and their reading levels are vague and misinformed, generally resting on top of a distinct, thinly veiled, political agenda.

In his essay, "Speed does matter in reading," Timothy Rasinski (2000) identifies a more specific problem with reading in the classroom, and, like many national writers, seeks to offer a remedy. He believes "excessively slow, disfluent reading leads to less overall reading" (p. 146). This may seem, on some levels, like an obvious statement, but it can be easily overlooked. He feels that, despite some national opinions to the contrary, slow reading can be a determent to learning. "It seems reasonable," he asserts, "to assume that fluency in reading leads to greater reading and greater reading leads to gains in fluency - fluency and reading volume are cause and consequence of one another" (p. 147). In keeping with this, Rasinski then argues for several methods that assist the student in the learning process and discourage slow reading rates. Among these are repeated readings and support readings, which "is done in activities where the reader reads an authentic text but is supported by a more fluent partner" (p. 148). He calls this, "buddy reading," which "can create complex instructional scenarios that are engaging, authentic, and leads to gains in fluency" (p. 149). The result, Rasinski argues, is a chain reaction of reading progress: "When the partners read, first the third grader reads the passage to his partner, then they read it together once or twice, and then, if time allows, the second grader reads it while the partner follows along and provides support and encouragement" (p.149). Like many national writers before him, Rasinski argues for a variety of methods to help encourage the student to read

better and fight against slow, inefficient and disfluent reading, which he sees as an unfortunate trend in schools today.

While he doesn't offer specific remedies to reading problems like Rasinski had, Gerald Bracey (2000), in his "The 10th Bracey Report on the condition of public education," does provides more specific data about the national reading problem to support essentially the same argument about reading that Ediger attempts to make. He writes frankly that, "trying to take demographic changes into account, I concluded that since 1963 there has been a small decline in… verbal score[s]" (p. 133). Although Bracey's finding may not seem overly positive, they are intended to directly refute what he sees as a highly biased report from a College Board panel: "...as much as three-fourths of the widely reported decline had stemmed from changes in the population taking the test: more minorities, more women, more students with mediocre high school records" (p.133). His findings, then, are intended largely as a rebuttal to this conclusion.

Like Ediger, Bracey acknowledges a great bias against the public school system and achievements in reading in the national consciousness. He speaks of how the Sandia Report, which portrayed American children's reading levels in a positive light, was suppressed by the first Bush administration, because, Bracey concludes, "one of their [the Bush Administration's] strategies was never to say anything positive about public schools." Similar research, announced later, was also suppressed. Some of this particular research included a report, entitled "How in the World Do Students Read?", that "found American students second in the world in reading skills among 9 year olds tested in 27 countries and eighth (though statistically tied with nine others for second) among 31 countries that tested 14 year-olds" (p. 134). These findings sat virtually undiscovered for months, without any media coverage or endorsement by the Bush

Administration. In short, much of Bracey's article deals with the largely unfounded negative attitudes towards reading in the public schools.

National attitudes toward reading in the public, however, are not the only significant attitudes on the matter. Karen Broaddus and Gay Ivey (2000), in their essay, target the national attitudes of the teachers:

> ...many of these students "can't read, won't read, or will read but fail to comprehend most information from [the] text" (Bintz, 1997, p. 20). Paired with this problem is the reality that many middle school teachers are reluctant to teach reading, either because they feel inadequately trained or because they consider it someone else's responsibility (Bintz, 1997; Gee & Forrester, 1988). (p. 68)

They then follow this up by blatantly stating, "students in middle schools still need good reading instruction, but many middle school teachers may be unprepared or unable to provide it" (Gee & Forrester, 2000, p. 68). Their solution is to align the instruction to the need and desire of the readers. "We have proposed a framework for teachers to reflect upon," they write, "that is based not on an established curriculum or on conventional wisdom of what middle school reading ought to be, but instead on evidence about who middle school students are" (p. 74).

This, in and of itself, echoes an earlier assertion made by Ediger (2000), who believes that a student will improve his/her reading and verbal abilities if given the choice of what to read: "the interest factor is very important when challenging pupils to achieve more rapidly in the three R's."(p. 402). He believes that "[learning] objectives for pupils to achieve should be significant" and that "pupils need to be interested in attaining these chosen objectives" (p. 402). Moreover, we can return to Rasinski (2000), who spoke of "the flexible attitude readers need to bring to the reading act" (p. 150). Along with Rasinski, both Ediger and Ivey & Broaddus, therefore, believe

in the flexibility needed to teach reading: "we need knowledgeable, reflective... teachers who are experts at tailoring the fit."(p. 75).

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the low-level reading skills of sight-word recognition and comprehension, during the first four weeks the Dolch Sight Word List (Appendix A) for third grade, the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) (Appendix B), and the Woodcock-Johnson Psychological Battery (Appendix C) were administered and analyzed. Parent surveys (Appendix D) were also distributed, collected and analyzed. All data discussed regarding students was taken from a sample of 15 students. The survey was handed out to 17 parents, of which 15 were returned and used in the data analysis. Two surveys were never returned.

Dolch Sight Word List

The Dolch Sight Word List for third grade consisted of 40 words (listed in alphabetical order) that a student at this level should have known how to read by sight. If decoding, or sounding out, the word is necessary, it was not considered to be a known sight word and was therefore not counted. 15 students were administered this list. Figure 1 displays the results.

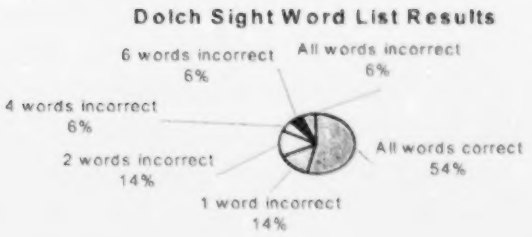

Figure 1. The number of words missed on the Dolch Sight Word List for 3rd grade.

Of the words not recognized by sight, two words, "better" and "laugh", were missed by more than one student. Other missed words included "carry," "only," "much," and "shall." The occurrence of unrecognizable words provided evidence that there were low-level sight word recognition skills in third grade. These words should all have been easily recognizable to a third grade student.

The Dolch Sight Word List provided the researchers with evidence of a lack of sight word recognition ability. In addition to the Dolch Sight Word List, the Wide Range Achievement Test (which also measured sight-word recognition) was also given.

Wide Range Achievement Test

The WRAT was a list of letters and sight words that became progressively more difficult as the list moved on. At first there were 23 capital letters that needed to be identified. Two letters from the student's name were also chosen to be identified. The list then moved to three-, four-, and five-letter words. Correctly identified words were marked with a circle; incorrect or unrecognizable words were underlined. Once eleven words in a row had been missed, the test was stopped. The number of correct words was counted and used as the students' raw score. A chart was then consulted to convert the raw score into a grade level equivalent. Any raw score

below 60 was considered to be below grade level. The results of the WRAT are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Wide Range Achievement Test Results

Raw Scores	Grade Level Equivalents	Number of Students Receiving Score
35	1st Grade Below	1
39	1st Grade Meets	1
45	1st Grade Exceeds	1
46	2nd Grade Below	1
53	2nd Grade Below	1
54	2nd Grade Below	2
55	2nd Grade Exceeds	1
56	2nd Grade Exceeds	2
61	3rd Grade Below	1
67	4th Grade Below	3
70	4th Grade Exceeds	1

On this test, only five students met or exceeded grade level standards for sight word recognition. Because this test calculated the grade level equivalent based on sight word recognition, it provided the researchers with even greater evidence of a lack of sight word knowledge than the Dolch Sight Word List. To further support this evidence, the Woodcock-Johnson Psychological Battery was given in order to test letter-sight word recognition and passage comprehension skills.

Woodcock-Johnson Psychological Battery

The Woodcock-Johnson Psychological Battery consisted of seven parts, but only two of those parts measured sight word recognition and comprehension. The first part, entitled "Letter-Word Identification," gave a list of pictures, letters, and then words that increased in difficulty. The students were asked to identify each picture and letter, and then read each word in sequential order. If a picture, letter, or word was identified correctly, a one was placed next to it. If it was not identified correctly, a zero was placed next to it. When a student missed five in a row, the test was stopped. The correct answers were added together, which gave the researcher a raw score. This raw score was then translated into a grade level by using a provided scoring table. Because these tests were given during the first month of third grade, a raw score below 34 (which translated into grade level 3.1 on the scoring table) was considered to be below grade level. The results of administering this part of the test are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

Results of the Letter-Word Identification Part of the Woodcock-Johnson Psychological Battery

Raw Score	Grade Level Equivalent	Number of Students Receiving Scores
17	1.1	1
19	1.3	1
30	2.4	3
31	2.5	1
32	2.8	1
34	3.1	3
38	4.1	1
39	4.4	1
40	4.7	2
44	6.2	1

The results of the Letter-Word Identification portion of the Woodcock-Johnson Psychological Battery indicated that over half the class was below grade level. These results provided the researchers with evidence of low-level reading abilities in sight-word recognition.

The second portion of the test measured passage comprehension. The students were given a series of sentences with blank spaces in place of certain words. They were to then fill in the space with a word in order to have the sentence make sense. This was then scored in the same way as the first portion – a one was given if the answer was correct, a zero if incorrect. The correct answers were given tabulated and a raw score found. This raw score was translated using

a given scoring table. This portion was also given during the first month of third grade, so a score lower than 17 (a 3.0 grade level equivalent) on this portion was considered below grade level. The results of administering this part are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

Results of the Passage Comprehension Portion of the Woodcock-Johnson Psychological Battery

Raw Score	Grade Level Equivalent	Number of Students Receiving Score
8	1.4	1
10	1.6	1
13	2.2	1
15	2.6	2
16	2.8	1
17	3.0	1
18	3.3	2
19	3.6	1
20	3.9	2
21	4.2	1
22	4.6	1
25	6.2	1

These results provided the researchers with evidence of low-level reading abilities in passage comprehension. This portion of the Woodcock-Johnson Psychological Battery indicated the 7 out of the 15 students tested were below grade level. These scores were consistent with the first portion results

To identify reading habits in the home environment, a parent survey was distributed to the parents of students participating in the research project.

Parent Surveys

Parent surveys were distributed to 17 parents. The parents were aware of the Action Research Project due to a parental permission slip that was previously signed. The cover letter also explained the purpose of the research to the parents. Of the 17 surveys sent out, 82% were returned. Surveys were accepted up to four weeks after they were sent out.

The parent survey consisted of seven questions altogether, three close-ended with the options of yes or no, and four open-ended allowing parents to fill in their own answers. These questions concentrated on the childrens' reading and other recreational behaviors at home or outside of school. One question allowed the child to express his or her feelings associated with reading by circling one of five faces. These faces showed different expressions, from very excited to very frustrated. This allowed the child to choose the appropriate emotion regarding reading, and helped to accurately reflect his or her attitude. Table 4 displays the results of the parent survey for questions one through four, and Table 5 displays the results for question five. Figure 2 displays the results for question 6. The Parent Survey is located in Appendix A.

Table 4

Results of Parent Survey Questions One through Four

Question	Yes	No	1	2	3	4
Read without help…	79%	21%				
Reads alone…	57%	43%				
Does parent read with child…	93%	7%				
How many other people read with child			15%	43%	21%	21%

Table 5

Results of Parent Survey Question Five – Other Activities in Which Child Participates

Activity	Number of Students Who Participate in Activity
Video Games	11
Television	9
Playing Outside	9
Sports	9
Playing	3
Other Activities	7

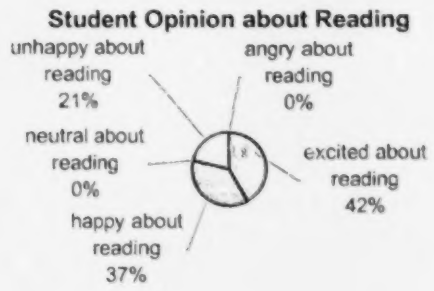
Student Opinion about Reading
unhappy about reading 21%
angry about reading 0%
neutral about reading 0%
excited about reading 42%
happy about reading 37%

Figure 2. Student Answers to Question 6 of Parent Survey

Question seven asked parents for any other comments they wished to share relative to their child's reading abilities or attitudes. Some of these comments were: "[He] has come a long way with his reading and I am so glad he loves to do it;" "[He] has trouble with some words. He doesn't really show any interest/attention span for reading yet, but can retain and put forth extra

effort if interested in subject;" "[She] has been reading since kindergarten. Very rarely do I have to pronounce a word for her. Her reading comprehension impresses me greatly."

After reviewing the results of the parent survey, a relationship was found between reading habits and attitudes at home and reading levels. Question two on the parent survey asked parents if their child read by themselves at home. The results showed that 43% of the students did not. A lack of interest in reading leads to low reading levels, thus supporting the findings reported by the test scores. Question five asked parents to list the activities besides reading in which their child participated. The main activities, television and video games, do not promote reading skills. This also supports low reading levels. In conclusion, students are showing a lack of interest in reading and are participating in activities that do not promote reading in the home or outside of school.

Through the use of the Dolch Sight Word List, the WRAT, the Woodcock-Johnson Psychological Battery and parent surveys, low reading levels in sight word recognition and comprehension has been found to exist within the classroom. To support these findings, research has been done to show the problem exists and that there are several probable causes.

Probable Causes

In order to fully understand the probable causes of low reading levels in the classroom, it is important to comprehend why they occur. Many factors can increase or decrease reading levels. These include family structure, physical factors, curriculum, and instructional strategies.

Family Structure

Family structures can affect the way a child learns in school. According to Eitzen (1992), "Children from single-parent families are less likely to be high achievers; they are consistently more likely to be late, truant, … and they are more than twice as likely to drop out of school" (p.

588). If a child is missing key lessons during the day because of arriving late or not attending school at all, then that child will be lacking in the skills needed to advance to higher learning levels. It is very difficult to make up the skills and strategies that are immersed into everyday lessons if they are continually missed. In question four of the parent survey, the parents were asked how many people read to their child. More than half of the responses stated either one or two people. This could be one or two parents, but more than likely it is not; because of today's declining family structure, it could just as well be older siblings or other relatives. If the people reading with the child do not have sufficient reading skills themselves, then the child cannot be expected to further their reading skill levels. In addition to family structures, physical factors can influence reading levels as well.

Physical Factors

The physical factors that affect reading levels can be medically, nutritionally or biologically motivated. One of the most common psychiatric conditions in school-aged children is Attention Deficit Disorder. Burke (1999) states, "Currently, between 3% and 5% of U.S. students (1.35 million to 2.25 million children have been diagnosed as having ADD" (p. 2). Observations of children diagnosed with either ADD or Attention Deficit Hypractivity Disorder have identified behaviors such as inattentiveness or impulsivity. These characteristics can contribute to the lack of actually learning reading skills in younger grades, and then a lack of interest in reading if and when those skills are obtained. Children with ADD or ADHD have such low attention spans that it is difficult for them to focus on reading for long stretches of time. This can be reflected in low reading abilities.

Another important physical factor affecting the reading levels of students is nutrition. Bro, Shank, McLaughlin and Williams (1996) state that hunger affects the performance level of students.

> The consequences of hunger may interfere with the learning process and well being of children. Skipping breakfast will likely have a negative effect on childrens' performance in the classroom. According to Pauk (1983), this deficiency cannot be made up later in the day. (pg. 111)

When a student's basic needs are not met first, they cannot be trusted to pay attention to school activities such as learning to read or actually reading.

Biological factors can also affect how students learn to read. Research into learning styles has increased in recent years, thanks to Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. According to Linksman (1998), "Kinesthetic learners… learn best by doing, by movement, and by activity…. We learn best when information presented matches our learning style" (p. 24-25). If a student's learning style does not match how the material is being taught, that material may not be learned as well as if it were presented differently. At times, the curriculum being used to teach reading may not reach every student's learning style.

Curriculum

A school's curriculum could also be the cause of low-level reading scores in sight word recognitions and comprehension. A curriculum may not have any connection to a child's lifestyle; the instruction would then be less meaningful to the child, and could create confusion or boredom. This could then cause the child to act out, which interferes with learning. According, to Prater (1992), "A lot of students' misbehaviors occur when they are bored (the material is too easy) or confused (the material is too hard)" (p. 25). If the curriculum does not

match the student's learning ability, it interferes with learning. This presents itself in their behavior, which directly affects their learning. The way a curriculum is set up can also affect a student's reading scores. If a whole language approach is used, and the books that are chosen as part of the curriculum are too difficult for the student, then that student will have a difficult time in learning the basic material needed to complete the following lessons. If a student does not comprehend the story being taught (especially in later grades when independent reading is expected), then they will have insufficient knowledge to do their work. This deficiency could directly affect their reading scores, especially in any comprehension areas that are being assessed.

The way material is presented could also have an affect on a student's learning and thus affect reading levels.

Instructional Strategies

A teacher's instructional strategies could also affect low reading levels. Again, if a strategy does not match a student's learning style, the student may not be able to focus and learn the material being taught. For example, if a student is a visual learner, and the teacher uses strategies involving mostly speaking, then that child may not remember all of the information (Linksman, 1998, p. 26). Conversely, if a student is an auditory learner, then that child needs teaching strategies that fit that learning style. Also, if a teacher's strategy for teaching the lesson does not appeal to the student, they may become bored and lose focus. A lesson needs to be appealing and interesting in order for a student to remain engaged.

There are many factors that can cause low reading levels in sight word recognition and comprehension. The student's family structure can have an impact on their reading outside of school. Physical factors such as medical, nutritional, and biological can affect how a student

learns to read in school. In addition, the curriculum and how it is taught can cause a student' s reading to test at low levels. An impaired ability to read can affect how a student performs across the entire curriculum; it affects how they learn any other subject they are being taught. Due to this widespread effect low reading levels can have on a student's performance in school, it is the teacher's responsibility to search for a solution. This solution must be adaptable to both the teacher and the student; because a teacher has more than one student with which to attend, he or she must search for a way to reach the low readers without taking away instructional time from the rest of the class. An approach to this dilemma is given in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Strategies for Teaching Reading

The mission of public speaking is to offer every child full and equal educational opportunities regardless of the background, education, and income of the child's parents. A most fundamental and important issue facing schools is how to teach reading and writing, particularly in the early grades (Snow, Burns, and Griffin 2001, p. 12). In 1999, a national summit was held on "Keys to Successful Learning" at the National Center for Learning Disabilities. In his presentation, Dr. Duane F. Alexander (2001) explored the broad area of reading research, and started his speech with the simple fact, "Learning to read is critical to a child's (and an adult's) well-being" (p. 1). Such an idea may seem evident, but its implications are too important for it to be taken, in any way, lightly. As Dr. Alexander's quote, and the above quote from Snow, Burns, and Griffin, plainly states, the teaching of writing and reading to children is one of the most important tasks that a teacher can undertake. It is also, not coincidentally, one of the most *difficult* tasks that a teacher can undertake. "Reading is not a natural act," Dr. Judy Johnson (2001) writes, "unlike learning how to speak, reading does not happen without being explicitly taught" (p. 1). Johnson also adds another crucial obstacle involved in teaching children to read.

She writes that students must want to read in order to increase reading skills. She feels that motivation is critical for learning the difficult task of reading especially for older students (p. 1).

Moreover, reading in and of itself is not necessarily the best way for students to learn to read. Some researchers feel that practice make perfect. However, using this strategy would not be advisable. Marilyn Jager Adams (2001), in her article, "The Three-Cueing System," writes the following:

> Research has also shown that as children's reading experience grows, [reading skills] tend to grow alongside.... The wisdom of the popular dictum, that reading is best learned through reading, follows directly. So, too, however, does the seriousness of it's most nettlesome caveat: Where children find reading difficult, they very often will not do it--or at least not with the sort of engagement that best fosters learning. (p. 3)

As a direct result of the incredible difficulty involved in this issue of reading pedagogy, teachers have long been bombarded with a variety of articles detailing different teaching methods for instructing children on how to write and, more specifically, how to read.

One of the topics that becomes especially clear as one sorts through these different articles is that there is no simple, easy method to solving this difficult national problem, but rather a variety of different possibilities for teaching children to read. For example, Catherine Snow is also quoted by Onkar Ghate (2001) as saying, "because reading is such a complex and multifaceted activity, no single method is the answer."(p. 2). Ghate goes on to say that in exemplary reading programs in Illinois, it has been found that there is no best way to teach reading. Though there may be no simple answer, there remains a rich plethora of possibilities regarding the task of teaching children to read.

The simple, though extensive, purpose of this portion of the project will be to explore some of the academic research articles written on the subject of reading pedagogy, and to explore the different techniques that have been offered to teachers within these texts. Some reading techniques discussed are quite common, others not quite so; yet, they all share the same common goal of improving a child's ability to read.

In an article entitled, "Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children," Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) state a variety of factors that are critical to reading abilities. They feel that effective reading instruction has to be built on a foundation that recognizes that reading ability is built not on one factor, but on a foundation built by several factors (p. 1). They go on to write: Many factors that correlate with reading fail to explain it; many experiences contribute to reading development without being prerequisite to it; and although there are many prerequisites, none by itself is considered sufficient. (p. 5).

Joseph K. Torgesen (2001), in his article, "Catch Them Before they Fall," identified one critical issue regarding the failure of reading pedagogy as not so much the right teaching strategy, but rather the right timing for the strategy. What Torgesen sees as one of the most compelling findings from recent reading research is that children who get off to a poor start in reading rarely catch up. Torgensen's argument is that, whatever teaching strategy is employed, early attention and effort must be made. While acknowledging other factors as well, R.A. Knuth and B.F. Jones (1991) echo Torgesen's concerns about timely intervention when they write, "although many students at risk come to school lacking in prior knowledge that is relevant to school achievement, teachers and schools do make a substantial difference" (p. 1). Julie Coiro (1998) also identifies the importance of teachers and intervention, such as when she notes "good reading teachers should introduce students to appropriate reading skills but present them within the context of

effective reading strategies" (p. 1). Like Coiro, Knuth and Jones, Torgesen also believes that intervention has a huge impact on students. He feels that regardless of the student's reading level, prevention and identification of the reading problem has a huge impact on the student's success in reading. "The best solution to the problem of reading failure," Torgesen goes on to write, "is to allocate resources for early identification and prevention" (p. 21). Yet, one may be inclined to ask, what types of illiteracy "prevention" are there?

There is, of course, a definite difference between reading strategies and reading skills; a difference which may not seem important, but is, if for no other reason than reading strategies are the issue that articles and teachers focus on as the way to improve children's reading abilities. Attempting to clarify such a distinction, Coiro (1998) notes the following:

> In simplest terms, reading skills instruction usually focuses on word identification; reading strategy instruction focuses on creating meaning.... Many times, when readers learn these [reading] skills, they learn them in isolation and often, they're unsure when or why to use one skill rather than another in a real reading situation. (p. 5)

Hence, we begin to see the important distinction between strategies and skills as a pedagogical practice, where reading strategies attempt to work within a particular context. In addition to noting the difference between skills and strategies, Coiro also provides her audience with several basic reading techniques. These include predicting, where readers attempt to establish some familiarity with the text; monitoring, where readers examine and re-examine their own understanding of the text; confirming, where readers check on their earlier predictions; reflecting, where readers reflect on their understanding of the text; and elaborating, where readers expand and analyze their reflections.

Repeated Readings

There have been numerous studies that demonstrate that one way to increase the reading levels of our students is to increase the frequency at which a student reads. The student reads familiar material that is usually timed. They continue to read the same material until it is read with few or no errors. Some researchers state that repeated readings are a good way to improve student's reading fluency (Dowhower, 1987; Herman, 1985; Oshea, 1987; Roshotte & Torgesen, 1986). This research also establishes a positive correlation between student's reading fluency and reading comprehension. Repeated reading facilitates increases in reading rate, word accuracy, expression, and the comprehension of practiced passages (Dowhower, 1994; Levy et al., 1993). Through repeated readings and ample reading practices with easy material, students can become automatic decoders and, thus, good readers (Samuels el al., 1992). Repeated readings using a series of different text is preferable to practicing just one passage, because it helps students increase automaticity with high frequency words, building a large core of quickly identified words (Dowhower, 1994). Repeated readings generate more fluent reading and greater comprehension for students both with and without LD classification (Sindelar et al., 1990). Even students at a beginning stage can improve fluency through the use of repeated readings (Weinstein & Cooke, 1992).

Sight Words

McKeown (1985) goes on to say that he feels that the number of times a student sees a word is a strong predictor of how well that student can learn it. Baker (1995) states that words must be encountered in text multiple times before their meaning becomes a part of the student's vocabulary. It was also discovered by Carroll that after word counts were taken of a student's textbooks, 50% of the print in books were made of only 109 different words, commonly referred

to as sight words. Dolch comprised a list of commonly used words that elementary students are supposed to know by time they leave the third grade. Sight words are taught in different ways by some of the teachers who use this strategy as one of several in teaching reading. This strategy is not meant to be used alone.

Skimming, Scanning and Studying

One such specific strategy a teacher can employ is skimming. Here, an emphasis is placed on looking over the reading material, before one proceeds to actually read it. During the process of skimming material, a student is not only finding the main idea and supporting details, but they are also looking for relationships that connect the ideas presented in the reading material to each other. In the article, "Developing Reading Strategies," Kenji Kitao and S. Kathleen Kitao (1994) describe the process of Skimming as the following:

> You should look at the pictures, the title, etc., and think about what you already know about the subject. You should try to find the main idea and the ideas that support it. You should think about how ideas in the reading passage are related to one another and look for words and phrases that give you clues to these relationships. (p. 10)

They then proceed to challenge the reader to examine his/her own intentions as a reader as well. "You should also think about your purpose for reading," they add; "are you looking for some specific information? Are you gathering general information? The different purposes you might be reading for influence how you read" (p. 17). In addition to this, according to the Mind Tools (2001) website, skimming can be used "where you only need the shallowest knowledge of the subject." On this point, the Mind Tools website also breaks reading down into two other types. The first type of reading they identify is scanning. This is where you read only introductions and

summaries to get a quick sense of the information contained in the reading material. Such a technique is employed only if you need a moderate level of information. The second type of reading they identify is studying. Studying is an in-depth and thorough examination of the reading materials. This strategy is to be used only when you need detailed knowledge of a subject (2001). In short, skimming, scanning and studying represent different types of reading strategies.

Independent Reading

Independent reading is another type of reading strategy. Education Place (1997), on their website, lists the many benefits of independent reading. It is defined as when students read texts and literature separate from one another. Education Place goes on to say that independent reading builds fluency. The website then argues that independent reading "leads to increased vocabulary development" (p. 1). Finally, Education Place contends that independent reading also "builds background knowledge, or schema" (p.2). What the website hopes will result from this strategy is a sort of domino effect when it comes to reading, where, "by reading widely, students are exposed to diverse topics and information which they can then use in future reading" (p. 2).

Schema

It has been proven that people tend to learn best when they can connect learning to their known environment and life experiences. This kind of learning, schema, goes hand-in-hand with independent reading. Schema is a process that emphasizes previous information that the reader already possesses. Marino C. Alvarez and Victoria J. Risko (1989) write, "readers rely on their prior knowledge and world experience when trying to comprehend a text" (p. 1). This is encouraged by independent reading, where the student slowly accumulates a wealth of knowledge that they can later access as they read more and more. This knowledge, in turn,

assists the student as background information while he or she reads further. "Because texts are never completely explicit," Alvarez and Risko go on to write, "the reader must always rely on preexisting schemata to provide plausible interpretations" (p. 1). "Plausible interpretations" are perfectly suited for independent reading. When one examines independent reading's symbiotic relationship with a useful tool like schema, one would be inclined to think that independent reading deserves at least some consideration by teachers willing to explore a variety of options when it comes time to teach children to read.

Reading Recovery

Another option to use in teaching children to read is a program entitled Reading Recovery. Reading Recovery is a very structured reading program used only by trained tutors with students who have not been able to learn to read using other methods. Roger Sensenbaugh (106) describes Reading Recovery as a program that "offers a daily half-hour one-on-one tutorial sessions for students who are having trouble learning to read after one year of formal instruction" (p. 106). The students read predetermined material with their tutor. This program is designed to allow students extra time to reach "a level equivalent to that of their peers," (p. 106). Sensenbaugh emphasizes that "the program is supplementary and short-term, with most students needing from 12-16 weeks of instruction... before they are successfully discontinued from the program" (p. 106). Such a goal seems reasonable. According to the Federal Department of Education, "most children who complete the Reading Recovery program can perform within the average achievement range and do not need remedial help again" (Federal Department of Education, 1993).

In regards to more specific information on how the program works, Reading Recovery is "focus[ed] on each student's strengths, not deficits" according to the Department of Education.

They feel that this program helps the students "to become independent readers." Furthermore, students in this program "learn to read by composing and writing their own messages." Consequently, teachers base their personalized instruction "on detailed analysis of student behavior and knowledge." Echoing this is Sensenbaugh (1994), who writes about how "an essential component of the Reading Recovery program is the training of the teachers who provide the tutorial instruction" (p. 106). More specifically, he adds, "Reading Recovery teachers learn to observe, analyze, and interpret the reading and writing behaviors of individual students and to design and implement an individual program to meet each student's needs" (p. 106). Clearly, Reading Recovery is a reading strategy that requires a great deal of added effort from teachers, but the results from students seem to be generally positive.

Cloze Technique

The cloze technique is yet another method for teaching children to read. John Trollop (2001) defines the cloze technique as having "every fifth or seventh word, for a customary total of 50 blanks out of a 250-350 word text, deleted from the text" (p.1). The students are to figure out the word that is missing by looking at context clues in the sentence. The intention is to get students to immerse themselves in the complexities of language and mechanics, rather than focus on isolated words and phrases. Proponents of this philosophy argue that the cloze technique assists not just language, but a wide variety of language functions. For example, look at the following findings:

> High correlations have been found across a wide variety of tests such as dictation, writing, reading (through multiple choice questions), listening comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary tests. The evidence therefore supports the idea that the

> cloze is not just measuring single skill abilities, but general language proficiency. (p. 1)

However, even the proponents of the cloze technique will concede that "completing a cloze test is not exactly the same as reading" (p. 1). More specifically, "it is possible some blanks will not test reading, but knowledge of English structure or vocabulary" (p. 1). Yet, such proponents argue, even knowledge of structure will assist the reader in reading abilities further down the road. Trollop also states that there are not only high correlations to other measures of reading comprehension, but also, many of the mental processes involved in the cloze technique of closing the gaps are the same that other readers use when they read (p. 1). It is because of this that, despite the cloze technique's perhaps odd and unique nature, it is still a legitimate strategy for teaching children to read and one that is easy to implement.

Whole Language

Many of the processes involved in the cloze technique echo some of the general tenets of whole language theory. Created, in part, as a response to the various forms of direct instruction, whole language was designed with the belief in mind that "children learn language best when engaging in authentic uses of language" (Trollop, 2001, p. 1). Students write stories based on their life experiences. The students, who now can read the very words they wrote, then read these stories. They learn by doing and not by a formal traditional phonics approach. Proponents of whole language, however, argue that it is not pedagogy, but a philosophy. Karen Diegmueller (1996), in her essay, "A War of Words: Whole Language Under Fire," states "whole-language teachers are supposed to teach phonics in context. But whole language is not just a reading and writing pedagogy. It is a philosophy" (p. 26). Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998), meanwhile, describe the principle governing instruction for whole language as to give priority in reading and

writing activities to that which is familiar to the child (p. 5). With Diegmueller's description of the cloze method in mind, it is relatively simple to see how the format of the cloze technique would be a good fit for the whole language philosophy. Echoing this, Tom Mandeville (1999) believes that "children learn language best when they have a pressing need, a 'need-to-know,' when they are involved in an authentic language process and don't know how to proceed (p. 119). In a sense, whole language, while also a philosophy, could be seen as a very broad, all-encompassing reading strategy, under which fits many of the more specific strategies, such as the cloze technique.

Three-Cueing System

Another more specific reading strategy with parallels to the tenets of the whole language philosophy is the Three-Cueing System. This strategy is also concerned with the construction of meaning during the reading process. The Three-Cueing System breaks meaning down into three parts: syntactic, semantic and graphophonic. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough/School District (2001) defines all three parts of the three-cueing system. First, syntax is defined as "the arrangement and interrelationship of words, phrases and clauses in sentences, and paragraphs" (p.1). Next, semantics is explained as "the meaning that words have in relationship to each other as well as on their own" (p. 1). Finally, graphophonics is defined as "the relationship between letters and sounds" (p. 1). These three different parts come together to form an image that is essentially a variation on the Venn Diagram. Where the three intersect is where meaning is created. "This cueing system," one proponent writes, "helps the reader to make sense of text by dealing with the relationship between the sounds of language and the written form of language" (Matanuska-Susitna Borough/School, 2001, p. 1). Like the whole language theory, the Three-

Cueing System is built by attempting to find and explore the complex inner-workings and relationships within all aspects of the English language.

Sustained Silent Reading, Reading Response, and Reading Aloud

Taking a less scientific approach, Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), reading response and reading aloud are three less formal strategies that are easy to implement. SSR is a period of time set aside everyday, which Gary Hopkins defines as an opportunity for the students to read material of their own choice in an environment, which fosters reading (Hopkins, 1997). In fact, Hopkins adds, "the main thrust behind most SSR programs is to demonstrate to students that pleasure-reading is something to be valued by all" (p. 1). Everyone reads silently everyday at the same time. This method of silent reading can also be called DEAR or Drop Everything and Read in some schools. Reading response, meanwhile, is where students explore their own respective reactions to the text that they have just finished reading. The students can accomplish this bit of introspection by answering questions; responding to specific passages; writing a hypothetical letter to the author; having a different students write in a Buddy Book Journal about a story they have read; writing a Hexagonal essay where six different students write their perspectives of a reading in a continuing essay; or writing a journal from the point of view of one of the story's characters. Reading aloud, meanwhile, "offers an ideal forum for exploring many dimensions of language and literacy" (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998, p. 5). Paraphrasing Jim Trelease, Anne Guignon (1998) adds that to improve literacy skills, reading, writing, speaking and listening, children should be read aloud to on a regular basis. Guignon goes on to state the following:

> The Department of Education's America Reads Challenge encourages the institution of tutoring programs to help raise the reading levels of school children

> and to raise the awareness of parents about reading's impact on children. Reading aloud to children is an important part of those programs. (p. 1)

The above quote is especially critical because it moves us in the direction of tutoring, one of the most discussed and analyzed reading strategies currently circling through academia.

Peer Tutoring

Tutoring, or cooperative learning, is a process both very common and highly successful in teaching students to read. Many motivational theories argue that "cooperative structures create a situation in which group members can only attain their own personal goals if the group is successful" (University of Twente, 1996, p. 1). Other educators, however, express some concerns, even while more or less endorsing it. Maureen Neubauer (2001), in her article, "Cooperative Learning and Reading Comprehension," recounts a personal classroom experience in the following passage:

> The lower achieving students were excited about reading and enjoyed receiving immediate feedback and being a team player. While my higher achieving students continued to score well, I did notice that sometimes they became frustrated with assisting, or being held accountable for the group's success. (p. 2)

This is, of course, a legitimate concern. However, cooperative learning nonetheless remains a very effective instructional strategy that works well in literature-based instruction ("Useful Instructional Strategies for Literature-Based Instruction," 1995, p. 1). Moreover, the article feels that "students learn to read, write, and think by having meaningful engagements with more experienced individuals.... Many times these individuals may be their peers" (p. 1). Indeed, peer tutoring is one of the most popular forms of cooperative learning, and of tutoring in general.

What exactly is peer tutoring? Susan Imel (1994) defines it simply as "the process of having learners help each other on a one-to-one basis" (p. 1). Page Kalkowski (1995) speculates "it is likely that peer and cross-age tutoring have been part of human existence since hunter-gatherer times" (p.1). If this is the case, one could assume that the success rate of peer tutoring must be considerable to continue over such a long period of time. In fact, Joan Gaustad (1993) states plainly, "one-to-one tutoring has long been recognized as superior to group instruction, especially for students with special needs" (p. 3). Moreover, because there has been so much success with peer tutoring, one can also assume that many educators would have written on the subject. Kalkowski herself states, "the research literature on the subjects of peer and cross-age tutoring is extensive." More specifically, "research on low-achieving and other high-needs students has increased in the last decade." (p. 1)

One approach to peer tutoring is to tutor the student on reading fluency. Fluency can be characterized by the student's effortless recognition of words without taking time to worry about decoding the word, which results in lower comprehension. The conserved cognitive energy can be devoted then to reading comprehension (LaBerge & Samuels 1974, p. 302).

Tutoring beginning readers in reading fluency gives readers lots of opportunities to practice recognizing and decoding words in text. Rereading familiar text with the student is one way to increase fluency, refine and reinforce word recognition, and build comprehension skills. It bolsters the tutor and the student's self-esteem, confidence, and accomplishment (Adams 1990, p. 26).

Various proponents of peer tutoring argue that peer tutoring not only shows improvement in the student's reading, but also builds self-confidence. The National Self Help Clearinghouse (2001) states that peer tutoring not only "activates and empowers students," but "builds an ethos

of cooperative values" (p.1). Thomas (1992) states that peer tutoring creates "a powerful influence on a child's development of identity and autonomy" (p.78). He also argues that Peer Tutoring is "learning through teaching" (p. 78), and that tutors learn "90% of what [they] TEACH someone else" (p. 78). Echoing this, Ginger Pinholster quotes Deborah Allen, a member of the University of Delaware's peer tutoring program, as saying that "the best way to learn something is to teach it" (Thomas, 1992, p. 78). Gaustad (1993) applauds peer tutoring because "feedback and correction are immediate" (p. 2). She also adds "tutoring has emotional as well as cognitive benefits. Students can achieve at their own pace without being compared to faster learners" (p. 3). Imel adds that "the old adage, 'those who teach learn twice,' holds true for peer tutoring and is frequently given as the basis for using the approach" (p. 1). In fact, Audrey Gartner and Frank Riessman (1993) even go so far as to point out that "the [research] literature also shows that the [educational] gains for tutors often outdistance those of the students receiving help" (p. 2).

Kylie Cavotta, Larraine Freeman and Sara Leikin (1997), in a brief article entitled, "Peer Mediated Instruction and Single Subject Research," list several of the very specific advantages to peer tutoring. Among them are the following:

- Pupils are simultaneously, actively involved in their own and others' learning.
- The teacher-pupil ratio is reduced.
- Children must learn to work together collaboratively if everyone is to succeed.
- Peer Tutoring promotes self-esteem and positive interdependence.
- Tutors and tutees develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter. (p. 2)

In terms of the advantages to peer tutoring, they go on to write, "children can be effective teachers to one another, and both parties (tutor and tutee) benefit from the relationship" (p. 2). Furthermore, moving beyond the simple tutor-tutee relationship, Imel (1994) even goes on to suggest, "although most peer tutoring is done with pairs of learners, sometimes having learners work in groups of three better meets the needs of both the learners and the learning task" (p. 2).

As for the tutors themselves, Pinholster goes on to point out that peer tutors are trained to prompt the students with questions, rather than with stock answers (Thomas, 1997, p. 78). This brings to mind the well-known Socratic Method of teaching. However, one crucial difference between methods like Direct Instruction and the Socratic Method and methods like peer tutoring is that peer tutors should guide students rather than become an authority figure that demands answers (Wheelock College online, 2001). In his Peer Tutoring Training Manual, Seth Aldrich (1993) advocates Class wide Peer Tutoring (CWPT), which promotes students assisting one another throughout the classroom. What makes CWPT different from regular peer tutoring, Aldrich goes on to state, is that it tends to structure activities and materials in such a way that tutors may or may not have higher level skills that tutees and still be successful tutors. Moreover, Aldrich (1993) argues, "research has demonstrated that students who are in need of skill reinforcement including students with mild disabilities benefit substantially from being peer tutors" (p. 13). Roger Martin (1997) also writes about the benefits of CWPT when he discusses the research work of Charles R. Greenwood in the following passage:

> According to Greenwood's chapter, "Class wide Peer Tutoring," a 12-year study conducted at Juniper Gardens Children Project in Kansas City, Kansas., revealed that children who tutored each other were better off than children who didn't. (p. 1)

Clearly, there are many articles written in strong support of peer tutoring, such as Martin's quote above. However, peer tutoring is far from a universal teaching method when it comes time to teach children how to read. Imel (1994) adds, "educators have been slow to adopt this approach, sticking instead to the more traditional, one-on-one, individualized approaches to instruction" (p. 2).

"Why then," Kalkowski (1995) asks rhetorically, "are peer and cross-age tutoring not in widespread use?" (p. 1). She then goes on to essentially answer her own question, listing some of the traditional reasons people have cited for being resistant to peer tutoring:

> ...tradition, teacher resistance, possible disadvantages accruing to the tutor, possible tutor impatience, implications of tutor selection, parent cautiousness, implications for school organization, variable suitability of different subjects for peer tutoring, and possible lack of expertise on the tutors' part. (p. 1)

These, of course, are just some of the reasons against the implementation of peer tutoring programs. There are many others. However, people who have worked with and/or researched such a program have by and large come out with extremely enthusiastic and positive responses to peer tutoring. The many quotes and passages compiled for this paper, taken from various research in support of peer tutoring, is evidence enough for such a conclusion.

There are several peer-tutoring programs that can be used in teaching reading. Some programs are very informal while others are very structured. One very formal program, Great Leaps, was studied in depth. This peer-tutoring program uses several different reading strategies that were discussed previously. It is a program that is easily learned and utilized by younger students. In this program, the tutee is timed for three different one-minute settings. In the first timing, students not only learn the sounds of all the consonants and short vowels, but also they

are taught different blends (phonics). Next, they are exposed to commonly used words (sight word recognition). Last, they read passages until they can do so with no errors (repeated readings).

After reviewing the various solutions in our research, we decided to implement the peer-tutoring program at our school between the sixth grade students and third grade students. The researchers decided to use a peer-tutoring program because it not only has been shown to increase reading levels in students, but also increases the self-esteem and confidence of all who are involved. The Great Leaps program was picked because it was easy for the tutors to learn and implement in the half hour that they had to tutor. It also combined several reading strategies that have been known to increase reading in students. The tutors concentrated on increasing reading fluency and sight word recognition with the second grade students that they worked with. If the research on increasing word frequency and repeated readings are correct, the researchers hope that the comprehension levels will also increase.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of the peer tutoring program, during the period of October 2001 to December 2001, the third graders will improve their oral fluency and sight word recognition skills, as measured by formal and informal assessments (i.e., the Dolch sight word list, the Woodcock Johnson Psychological Battery and the Wide Range Achievement Test).

In order to accomplish the project objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Train intermediate students in the peer-tutoring program.
2. An instructional sequence consisting of a pre-set order of activities will be implemented from the "Great Leaps" reading program. These activities will address oral fluency and sight word recognition skills.

Project Action Plan

During the weeks from October 2001 to mid – December 2001 peer tutors will work with the third grade students for 30 minutes, two times per week. They will be following a program entitled "Great Leaps Reading: Building Fluency for Reading Success." The purpose of this program is to improve reading fluency, sight word recognition skills and, in turn, other reading skills, such as reading comprehension. The students will work one-on-one with their tutor for 30 minutes per session. The program uses phonics (Appendix E), sight words (Appendix F) and graded reading passages (Appendix G). During the phonics portion, students will begin with the most common and easily pronounced words and progress to more difficult words and sounds. Students will then concentrate on learning common sight words (used in phrases during reading). They will also use graded reading passages to practice reading skills in context.

This program uses a specific instructional sequence. This sequence is as follows:

1. Preview: The tutor will model the correct responses (i.e. correct pronunciation of difficult words) before beginning each session.
2. Student Reads: After tutor modeling, the student is asked to read as many sounds or words as possible in one minute from his or her copy of the reading materials. The tutor will offer the correct pronunciations during the timed reading.
3. Tutor Records: The tutor circles all errors on his or her copy of the reading materials.
4. Review: the tutor and student will review the student's performance on the task, correcting errors and practicing the correct pronunciation of sounds and words. Students will then set a goal for the next session.

5. Decisions: If the student does not read the entire page within one minute with two or fewer errors, the student will read the same passage again during the next session. This page will be repeated until it is mastered. Once it is mastered, the student makes a "Great Leap!" and reads a more difficult page during the next session.
6. Record Data: The tutor will accurately record all data on the student's progress chart (Appendix H).
7. Celebrate/Support: The tutor will provide a reward for any leap to a new page. Students who do not leap are supported for their effort.

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, formal and informal assessments will be given at the beginning and the end in order to assess progress. These assessments will include the Dolch sight word list, the Woodcock Johnson Psychological Battery and the Wide Range Achievement Test. A parent survey) and review of cumulative records and past work portfolios will also be used to assess progress.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to improve the oral fluency and sight word recognition skills of third grade students. The implementation of the Great Leaps tutoring program was selected to effect the desired changes. Fifteen students were tested. From this group, five students were chosen to begin tutoring in October of 2001. Three weeks into the program, one student moved, which left a core group of four students who finished the program.

"Great Leaps Reading: Building Fluency for Reading Success" was the primary resource used throughout the intervention. One deviation from the action plan was the use of the Dolch Sight Word List as a supplement to the program for the tutors to use for further review. The program involved phonics, sight words and graded reading passages. The purpose of the program was to allow tutoring to improve reading fluency and sight word recognition. The third grade students met with their sixth grade tutors for 30 minutes at a time, twice each week. Each session was divided into four sections: phonics, sight words, graded reading passages and review. The first three were all completed as one-minute timed tests. The last portion, review, was completed using the rest of the 30-minute period. The phonics portion began with common and easily pronounced words, and then progressed to more difficult words and sounds. The sight

word portion worked on the most common words in reading. These were presented in phrases for the students to read. Graded reading passages were then used to practice skills in context. Each of the first three sections was presented in the same way. The sequence was as follows: preview, student read, tutor read, review, decisions, record data and celebrate/support.

The researchers followed the initial action plan except for the deviation mentioned above. Through the use of the action plan the researchers found the following results.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effects of peer tutoring among third grade students, the researchers used three tests before the tutoring program began. A second round of the same tests was given after the tutoring was complete to determine if a change in sight word recognition and oral fluency had occurred. This allowed the researchers to compare the scores and determine if there was an increase, decrease, or no change in the reading scores. The researchers used the Woodcock-Johnson Psychological Battery as their largest data collection method. It included two parts – the letter word recognition portion and the passage selection portion. The Dolch sight word list and the WRAT were used to further test sight word recognition skills.

Woodcock-Johnson Psychological Battery

The results from the second round of testing were compared to the initial test scores that preceded the tutoring. The results are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6

Woodcock-Johnson Pre-Test and Post-Test Reading Score Results

	October 2001		December 2001	
	Recognition	Comprehension	Recognition	Comprehension
Student 1	2.2	2.1	2.9	3.9
Student 2	1.3	1.6	2.3	2.2
Student 3	2.4	2.6	2.6	3.6
Student 4	2.2	2.5	2.8	3.6

The intervention appears to have had a positive effect on the targeted reading scores. Of particular note is the increase in comprehension scores; students 1 and 3 showed significant growth of a year or more. Student 2 showed a year's worth of growth in the letter word recognition portion. The WRAT was given in order to supplement the scoring of this reading skill area.

Wide Range Achievement Test

The WRAT is a test that measures the reading of sight words in an increasingly difficult format. A preliminary test was given before the tutoring program began, and the same test was given again after the tutoring program was complete. The results are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7

WRAT Pretest and Posttest Reading Score Results

	October 2001	December 2001
Student 1	2.0	2.9
Student 2	1.9	2.2
Student 3	2.0	2.9
Student 4	2.4	2.9

An increase in test scores is evident for each student. Students 1 and 3, who were at the same grade level in October, gained an additional nine months' worth of sight-word recognition ability in two months. Conversely, Student 2 only gained three months' worth of ability. This could be the result of how the students interacted with their tutor, or how seriously the students responded to the program. An additional test, the Dolch sight word list, was given to support the WRAT and Woodcock-Johnson findings.

Dolch Sight Word List

The Dolch sight word list for third grade was given to students before tutoring began. These results (for all 15 students) were displayed in pie chart format in Chapter Two. The list was presented to the students who were tutored again after they had completed the program. The results are displayed in Table 8.

Table 8

Dolch Sight Word List Pretest and Posttest Results

	October 2001	December 2001
Student 1	six words missed	one word missed
Student 2	45 words missed	10 words missed
Student 3	four words missed	two words missed
Student 4	no words missed	no words missed

These results show an increase in test scores for each student. Student 4 did not miss any words in October, and scored perfectly in December as well. As there is no fourth grade reading list, growth cannot be determined past the third grade level.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The researchers felt that the tutoring program was quite successful. The students who were tutored showed an increase in their test scores for sight word recognition and oral fluency. Students 1 and 4 seemed to show the greatest overall progress. Student 2 showed much progress as well. Student 3 had scores somewhat lower than the others, but still progressed in every area.

Students 2 and 4 made the most progress on the sight word recognition portion of the Woodcock-Johnson Psychological Battery. Each gained twelve and thirteen months' worth of

ability respectively. Students 1 and 3 only progressed seven and two months respectively. On the passage comprehension portion, Students 1 and 3 showed the most progress, with each gaining a year or more, while students 2 and 4 both only progressed six months. The reversal in scores for the sight word recognition and the passage comprehension portions could be attributed to a number of causes: student interest and involvement, tutor participation, or outside factors such as the tutoring environment.

The students also showed progress on the Wide Range Achievement Test. Again, Students 1 and 3 showed the most progress with each having nine months' growth in ability. Students 2 and 4 showed only three and five months' growth respectively. But because the object of the program was to improve their reading skills, any progress was welcomed.

The Dolch sight word list was not scored based on grade level, but on the number of words missed. Of particular interest is the score of Student 1. This student could not read one word on the list before tutoring began; by December this student missed only ten words.

The researchers feel that the tutoring program had successful and unsuccessful components. Some of the successful portions of the program included growth in the targeted areas – sight word recognition and comprehension. This was accomplished using peer tutors, which were other students to whom the third grade students could relate. The program itself was interesting and engaging. The students felt the challenge of having only one minute to accomplish as much as they could. This "pressure" actually turned out to be beneficial for them. The fact that they were pulled out of class was seen as an added benefit, but a program such as this could also be successful between high and low readers as well as between students of different ages; therefore class time could be set aside to use it in a whole class setting. Because the program was interesting, it kept both the tutors and tutees engaged, adding to the program's success. Since Great Leaps rewards students who make that "great leap," and students could see their progress, it offered intrinsic as well as extrinsic rewards. The tutored students gained confidence each time they made a leap, which gave them the ambition to succeed on the next levels as well.

Some areas that the researchers would change in this intervention include a change in environment, a more thorough selection of tutors, and an increase in the length of time to implement the program. The groups sat in the hall in front of the computer lab in order to be

timed by the teacher. Being in a hallway where anyone could walk by and be disruptive may have distracted the students. If an aide could take the groups to a quiet room where there were no distractions, the students may have a better chance to concentrate. Ultimately, the tutors may be trusted to time the sessions themselves, which would allow them to isolate themselves even further, and eliminate any disruptions from each other as well. The tutors were chosen by their teacher. If the program coordinators could set up a checklist of criteria that the tutors had to meet, and then interview each of them, an even more effective set could be found. This may benefit the tutees even more. The researchers implemented the program for an eight-week period. A longer time period for tutoring could possibly allow for even more growth from the tutees. Other grade levels may be incorporated as well; the program can be adapted to many grade levels.

The purpose of this research project was to increase the sight word recognition and reading comprehension levels of third grade students using peer tutors. The researchers found that a structured tutoring program using sixth grade students as tutors was needed to successfully complete the objectives. The use of the Great Leaps tutoring program kept both the tutors and tutees actively interested and engaged. The researchers discovered that when the sixth-grade students were held accountable for the third-grade students' success, they rose to the challenge and performed their duties well. Through the research presented in Chapter 2, a deficiency in reading skills was found. The tutoring program helped lessen these deficiencies. By increasing reading levels, students were better able to perform in every area of the curriculum, not just in reading and language arts. The goal of this action research project was to increase student reading skills. By implementing peer tutoring, this goal can be reached by any educator.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
DOLSCH SIGHT WORD LIST

THIRD

about
better
bring
carry
clean
cut
done
draw
drink
eight
fall
far
got
grow
hold
hot
hurt
it
keep
kind
laugh
light
long
much
myself
never
only
own
pick
seven
shall
show
six
small
start
ten
today
together
try
warm

APPENDIX C
WOODCOCK-JOHNSON PSYCHOLOGICAL BATTERY

TEST 22

Letter-Word Identification

Basal: 6 lowest-numbered items correct
Ceiling: 6 highest-numbered items failed

Score 1.0

First Trial | Last Trial

A ___ ___ house

1 ___ chair
2 ___ book
3 ___ dog
4 ___ cat
5 ___ O
6 ___ S
7 ___ A
8 ___ z
9 ___ G
10 ___ D
11 ___ m
12 ___ h
13 ___ j
14 ___ to
15 ___ in
16 ___ dog
17 ___ as
18 ___ get
19 ___ was
20 ___ his
21 ___ when
22 ___ fixed
23 ___ must
24 ___ about
25 ___ part
26 ___ knew
27 ___ because
28 ___ faster
29 ___ whole
30 ___ shoulder
31 ___ island
32 ___ correctly
33 ___ since
34 ___ personal
35 ___ experiment
36 ___ distance
37 ___ bounties
38 ___ process
39 ___ doubtful
40 ___ moustache
41 ___ cologne
42 ___ hesitating
43 ___ masculine
44 ___ sufficient
45 ___ domesticated
46 ___ preyed
47 ___ therapeutic
48 ___ significance
49 ___ bouquet
50 ___ apparatus
51 ___ diacritical
52 ___ debutante
53 ___ trivialities
54 ___ expostulate
55 ___ stochastic
56 ___ ubiquitous
57 ___ enceinte

Raw Score

Encircle actual raw for the Raw Score

Raw Score	W	SEM (W)	AE	GE
0	316	12	2-4	<2.5
1	327	11	2-7	<2.8
2	335	9	2-9	<3.0
3	343	8	3-0	<3.1
4	350	7	3-5	<3.6
5	356	7	3-9	<3.10
6	362	7	4-1	<4.2
7	367	7	4-5	<4.6
8	372	7	4-8	<4.9
9	376	7	5-0	<5.1
10	381	7	5-3	<5.4
11	386	7	5-6	<5.7
12	392	8	5-8	<5.9
13	398	8	5-11	<6.2
14	404	7	6-2	<6.5
15	410	7	6-4	<6.7
16	415	6	6-6	7.0
17	419	6	6-7	7.1
18	423	6	6-8	7.2
19	427	6	6-10	7.3
20	430	6	6-11	7.4
21	434	6	7-0	7.5
22	437	6	7-1	7.5
23	440	6	7-2	7.6
24	444	6	7-3	7.7
25	447	6	7-4	7.8
26	450	6	7-6	7.9
27	453	6	7-7	8.0
28	457	6	7-8	8.1
29	460	6	7-10	8.3
30	463	5	7-11	8.4
31	466	5	8-1	8.6
32	470	5	8-2	8.8
33	473	5	8-4	8.9
34	476	5	8-6	9.1
35	479	5	8-8	9.3
36	482	5	8-10	9.6
37	485	5	9-0	9.8
38	488	5	9-3	10.1
39	492	5	9-6	10.4
40	495	5	9-11	10.7
41	498	5	10-4	11.1
42	501	5	10-9	11.4
43	504	5	11-2	11.8
44	507	5	11-7	12.2
45	511	5	12-0	12.7
46	514	5	12-6	13.1
47	517	6	13-0	13.6
48	520	6	13-7	14.2
49	524	6	14-3	14.9
50	528	6	15-1	15.7
51	532	8	16-2	16.7
52	536	7	17-8	17.9
53	542	7	21	21.6
54	548	8	27	26.8
55	557	10	32^{70}	26.9^{70}
56	572	14	32^{95}	26.9^{94}
57	589	18	32^{99}	26.9^{99}

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APPENDIX D
PARENT SURVEY

Parent Survey
Student Reading Skills

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Please take a few moments to fill out this survey. It will help me in determining what you feel are your child's current reading abilities so that I may know exactly on what areas the peer tutor should work.

1. Does your child read without anyone's help? YES / NO

2. Does your child ever read when no one else is around (in his or her room, in the kitchen, etc.)? YES / NO

3. We all lead busy lives; sometimes there isn't enough time to do all the things we want. When you can find time, do you read with your child? YES / NO

4. How many people in your household sit down and read with your child? _____

5. What other activities does your child enjoy (TV, video games, playing outside, etc.)?

   _____

   _____

6. Please have your child circle the face that best represents his or her feelings about reading.

7. Please share any other comments you may have. _____

   _____

   _____

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